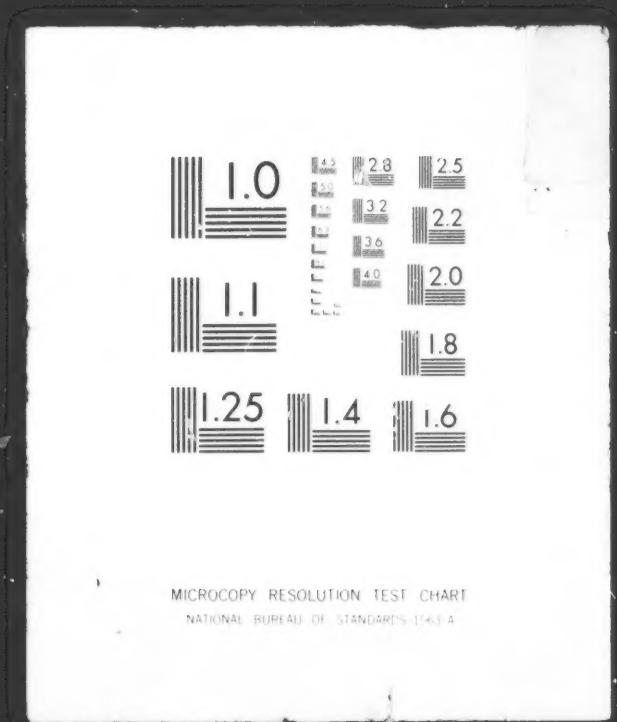
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DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 193 138 SO 012 865

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TITLE Moral Peers to the Rescue! A Critical Appraisal of the "Plus 1" Convention In Moral Education.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Discussion (Teaching Technique); Educational Assessment; Educational Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; *Ethical Instruction; Evaluation Methods; Literature Reviews; *Moral Development; *Peer Influence; Peer Teaching; *Teacher Role; *Theories
IDENTIFIERS Fraenkel (Jack); Kohlberg (Lawrence); Wilkins (R A)

ABSTRACT

A basic assumption regarding moral development and a critical corollary to this assumption are analyzed. The assumption, advanced by Lawrence Kohlberg, is that moral education requires a group discussion leader who can pitch moral arguments one stage above (plus 1) the majority of the class. The corollary to this assumption, based on critical studies by Jack Fraenkel and R.A. Wilkins, argues that most teachers are not developmentally advanced enough to consistently produce such plus 1 arguments. The paper states that the corollary is invalid because it is based on data referring to specific instances of reasoning rather than on a spontaneous capacity to reason. Further, by comparing some of his own data with data collected by other researchers, Wilkins followed an irregular and questionable procedure. Although these critiques lead one to question the empirical basis for the critique of the feasibility of the plus 1 moral convention, it does not mean that Kohlberg's initial assumption regarding the plus 1 convention is correct. In fact, one can question this convention from at least two standpoints: 1) Is the one stage discrepancy really the most appropriate indicator of successful classroom moral education?, and 2) Is a teacher-student discrepancy necessary for successful moral education? The conclusion, which rests on findings often overlooked in the moral education literature, is that moral development is closely related to the degree of heterogeneity of student moral reasoning in the classroom and that leaderless discussion groups are just as valuable for moral development as are teacher-led discussions. (DB)

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Moral peers to the rescue! A critical appraisal of the "+1" convention in moral education.

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There is a long-standing assumption in the fields of moral stage development and moral education that successful moral education requires a group discussion leader who can effectively pitch moral arguments one stage above (hence "+1") the majority of the class (Kohlberg, 1978). There is a recent critical corollary to this assumption that argues that most teachers are not developmentally advanced enough to consistently produce such +1 arguments (Fraenkel, 1978; Wilkins, 1980). In this paper I propose to question both the central +1 assumption as well as the corollary. First I will address the corollary.

The idea that classroom teachers may not realistically be expected to adhere to the +1 prescription for classroom moral education originated in the critical writing of Jack Fraenkel (1978). Fraenkel raises the argument that "since Kohlberg has stated that only ten percent of the population reaches Stages 5 or 6, the laws of probability suggest that there are many teachers who themselves reason at the lower stages, and who accordingly are likely to come in contact with students reasoning at stages higher than their own" (1978, p.254).

The empirical support for the Fraenkel position comes from a recent article in this publication (Wilkins, 1980). Wilkins concludes that teachers are often not sufficiently advanced in moral reasoning

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to fulfill the role of the +1 facilitatior of discussion in moral education. Upon closer inspection, however, Wilkins' conclusions appear unwarranted. There are two central problems with the Wilkins study: the choice of the dependent measure and the sampling.

The dependent measure Wilkins chose is Rest's (1979) Defining Issues Test (DIT). As Rest (1979) himself admits, the DIT measures evaluation of presented reasoning, not spontaneous capacity, as the standard Kohlberg (Kohlberg, Colby, Gibbs, Speicher-Dubin, Candee & Power, 1979) measure does (cf. Berkowitz, 1980). If, as Wilkins did, one wishes to reach conclusions about the capacity of an individual to produce reasoning at a certain level of developmental sophistication, then one ought to adopt a measure designed expressly for such a purpose. Indeed, the focus of this enterprise is to question the ability of classroom teachers to produce "+1" moral arguments. Their ability to recognize them is, at best, a tangential issue.

A second point regarding the choice of the DIT concerns the appropriateness of the summary index employed by Wilkins. Wilkins used the standard (but already outdated) P score (Rest, 1979). This score is a weighted percentage of the ranking of principled stages of reasoning, i.e., stages 5A, 5B, and 6. Wilkins used this index to derive a graphic representation of the overlapping distributions of teacher and student reasoning. These distributions actually represent the overlap of teacher and student preferences for post-conventional (principled) moral reasoning. They do not represent mean or modal stages, nor do they represent production capacity. Wilkins attempted

to extrapolate modal stage scores from the mean P scores, but offered no justification for the attempt. Furthermore, Rest himself (1979) has admitted that Davison's (1979) D score is a generally preferable index to the P score.

The P score is a measure of principled reasoning. Normative Kohlberg data (Candee, Graham & Kohlberg, 1978; Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs & Lieberman, 1979) suggest that principled reasoning is almost never produced by high school students (they are more typically conventional reasoners in middle class populations and transitional between pre-conventional and conventional stages in lower class populations). Even in most adult populations principled reasoning is rarely produced. Colby et al. (1979) report only 11-16% of subjects reaching stage 4/5 between ages 24 and 36. Candee et al. (1978) report only 3% of a sample with a mean age of 48 at stage 4/5 or higher. While students and teachers may be able to recognize and value stereotyped principled arguments, they cannot produce such. Production, afterall, is really the focus of Wilkins' argument.

Wilkins' sampling also weakens the validity of his conclusions. Wilkins adopts student data from Rest (1976) and then collects his own "teacher" data for the purpose of comparison. While there may be no problem with this procedure, and while Wilkins acknowledges the irregularity and suggests supportive preliminary data, it behooves Wilkins to provide the reader with some concrete evidence of the comparability of the samples. They were,after all, collected in

different studies, at different times, and on two different sides of the world. In addition to this point, Wilkins' "teachers" are actually education graduate students in preparation to become teachers at the high school level. Rest (1979) has argued clearly that development, as measured by the DIT, continues as long as one's education continues. Thus these students are not necessarily at the apex of their adult development. Gilligan and Murphy (1979) and Kohlberg (1973) further argue that development continues into adulthood. The conclusion one might reach is that while these barely post-adolescent graduate students may not be far advanced beyond the level of their would-be students, experienced practicing teachers might be. One wonders why Wilkins did not include a sample of current classroom teachers in the study, since those are the subjects he wished to reach conclusions about.

These critiques lead one to question the empirical basis for the critique of the feasibility of +1 moral education. We may therefore conclude that the Wilkins data do not demonstrate that teachers are not sufficiently advanced beyond the level of their students to allow for successful Kohlberg moral education in the classroom. Of course we cannot conclude from this that the teachers are sufficiently advanced. In fact, there is evidence that few adults ever get beyond Kohlberg's conventional stages of moral reasoning (Candee et al., 1978; Colby et al., 1979). Since Wilkins makes this point himself, one wonders why he chose an inflated (by a full two stages) measure of moral reasoning capacity (Rest, 1979).

While it may appear that this analysis leaves us with an unresolved issue of the feasibility of Kohlberg moral education, fortunately there is a solution to this question. This solution rests upon a questioning of the necessity of the +1 procedure for such moral education. Fraenkel and Wilkins are not alone in assuming that a classroom moral discussion leader must be able to argue one stage above the majority of students in his/her class for moral education to be successful. This assumption is quite firmly embedded in the moral education literature (e.g., Beyer, 1978; Fenton, 1978; Hersh, Paolitto & Reimer, 1978). The +1 convention originally derives from the Piagetian notion of equilibration and cognitive conflict. Piaget (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) contends that stage development results from an imbalance in the present structure of reasoning due to non-assimilable (i.e., incompatible) inputs. Those inputs may be higher stage arguments. One of the earliest studies of moral acceleration (Turiel, 1966) led to the conclusion that reasoning one stage above one's own is the optimal discrepancy for such developmental benefits. The Turiel study has since been widely criticized even by the author himself (Broughton, 1978; Kurtines & Greif, 1974; Turiel, 1972). The +1 convention was further supported by Rest's (Rest, 1973; Rest, Turiel & Kohlberg, 1969) work in validating the Kohlberg stages (work that paradoxically led to Rest's alternative measure, stages and concept of stages). Rest found that people tend to prefer higher stage reasoning but can only comprehend reasoning at or, at most, one stage above their own stage. Since then writers have presented numerous techniques and

curricula for administering the +1 method in the classroom or in other group contexts (Beyer, 1978; Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975; Colby, Kohlberg, Fenton, Speicher-Dubin & Lieberman, 1977).

One can question this convention from two standpoints: (1) Is the one-full stage discrepancy really the most appropriate teacher-student discrepancy for successful classroom moral education? (2) Is a teacher-student discrepancy necessary at all for successful classroom moral education? Recent refinements in the Kohlberg moral stage scoring system allow for greater precision in identifying an individual's stage(s) of moral reasoning. Such refinements allowed Berkowitz, Gibbs and Broughton (in press) to demonstrate that, in college peer dyads, a discrepancy smaller than one full stage was optimal in producing individual moral growth. In fact, a +1/3 stage condition was the only condition (as opposed to a same-stage and a +1 condition) that led to significant development as compared with a control sample. The conclusion reached was that optimal discrepancy depended upon the presentation of novel reasoning in the context of same stage overlap. Berkowitz et al. found that +1 discrepancies led to partners talking "past" each other. While this refines the +1 convention, it does not solve the problem of a teacher who is at a lower stage than his/her students.

When one inspects the moral education literature carefully, a few interesting, but often overlooked, findings emerge. The first is that classroom heterogeneity, in terms of students' stages of

moral reasoning capacity, is essential if individual moral growth is to result from moral discussion. In an extensive study of high school moral discussion curricula, Colby et al. (1977) found that development was closely related to the degree of heterogeneity of student moral reasoning in the individual classrooms. This was true regardless of the teacher's style and moral sophistication. Moral education, therefore, seems to depend upon the reasoning of the students more than on the reasoning of the teachers. This leads to another interesting phenomenon in the moral education literature.

In the now classic Blatt and Kohlberg (1975) study that pioneered the work in Kohlberg moral education in the classroom, there is an often overlooked group, the leaderless discussion group. There were three testing times; the pretest, the posttest and the followup. The 11 and 15 years olds in the leaderless discussion group did not demonstrate the immediate pretest to posttest gains that the experimental group demonstrated. Blatt and Kohlberg report posttest gains of +31,+11, and -20 for the experimental, leaderless, and controls, respectively in the full sample. The leaderless discussion subjects far surpassed the experimental subjects between the posttest and the followup (+43 to +30). Overall from pretest to followup, the changes were +64 for the experimentals, +50 for the leaderless, and +25 for the controls. It is interesting to note that the leaderless effect was marked for the "common man" sample and non-existent for the "disadvantaged" sample. These findings are compatible with the

findings of Berkowitz, Gibbs and Broughton (in press) that reveal significant pre-post gains in leaderless peer dyads. It thus seems that not only are +1 teachers not necessary for moral growth, but that teachers may not be necessary at all!

A final point in support of this critique of the +1 convention stems from the recent developments in Kohlberg moral education (Hersh, Paolitto & Reimer, 1978; Power, 1979). Kohlberg has shifted his emphasis from the classroom to the total environment. In doing so he has also shifted from an emphasis on exposure to +1 reasoning (still important, but somewhat less so than previously) to exposure to a moral atmosphere and to peer normative structures. These facets of the "just community" are believed to be the central components in successful moral education. Therefore we may reiterate the claim that teachers capable of +1 reasoning may be a relatively expendable component of moral education.

It is important to note that, while Fraenkel's (1978) position and Wilkins' (1980) supportive data are suspect, and while there is substantial evidence to conclude that +1 exposure may be a largely misrepresented convention, I am not trying to argue that teachers are a valueless component of the moral education process. Indeed, I feel that the teacher's role is largely misunderstood. They are there as models and facilitators rather than simply producers of +1 reasoning. For that role we may rightly turn to one's peers. Peer reasoning is often more seductive, more convincing, and more stimulating. As Zalaznick (1979) has pointed out, however, students may use moral stage theory as a tool of discrimination and oppression.

It is therefore the teacher's duty to promote an atmosphere of fairness, a context in which the democratic interplay of moral ideas can promote an atmosphere conducive to student development. Finally, I applaud and support Wilkins' call for the moral education of present and prospective educators, although we invoke different rationales. If we are to move toward a more just society, all citizens are obligated toward new moral plateaus, especially those citizens who accept the awesome responsibility of training our youth.

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